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An Extra Edge for Your Proposal

Rules for Strong Grant Writing

From Houston Chapter of AFP

When you submit a grant proposal you would hope that your proposal is the one that is most favorably looked on when the funding decision is made. Here are some hints gleaned from a number of foundation grant makers on what makes a good proposal and one that will be favorably considered.

1. Make sure that you have a proposal that clearly states what you want to fund in the first paragraph.
2. Don't try to stretch the facts to get your proposal funded if it does not fit the criteria of the foundation or granting agency. Look around for a funder who is already interested in your project.
3. Leave no question unanswered. If a proposal immediately brings some obvious questions to mind, it may be easier for the funder to deny your request than to go through the steps to get these obvious questions answered.
4. Assume your proposal will be read by a reviewer who wants to do something else and is looking for an excuse to set your proposal aside. Be concise and be compelling.
5. Write like you talk. We are all more passionate when we talk and this will put more emotion into your writing. Avoid the archaic, flowery and meaningless wordiness that comes from writing before you have the proposal all thought out.
6. Use the simple whole declarative sentence. It tells it like it is and leaves no confusion about what you mean.
7. Use plain English. This is no time for the thesaurus. If you force the reader to use a dictionary, they will not be impressed; they will save themselves the work and set your proposal aside (or worse).
8. Never ever, lie or exaggerate in your proposal. They'll figure it out and then wonder what else you have fudged. You may never find out why your proposal was rejected but your credibility will be gone with that funder for years to come. If you are going to help 500 people, don't say it will be 1,000.
9. Keep a sense of humor. People who think they have the answers to every problem are constantly bothering grant makers. Just state the facts regarding your proposal and let the funder decide the merits of your proposal. They will appreciate your confidence in their judgment.
10. If you aren't funded, find out why and try to remedy the objections before you try again. But do try again.
11. Submit your proposal two weeks before the deadline. As such, it will be the first one read and will be the benchmark for all of those to follow.
12. One week after your proposal arrives, call and ask if there is any other information they need. If the answer is "No" you will know your proposal is complete. If they do require anything else, you have time to get it in before the deadline.
13. No matter how many times a foundation or an agency has funded you, never, never, never submit a half-done proposal. This

shows you are taking the funder for granted. A new reviewer may not know about you and you will have to go back to the beginning and start over. It is best to always assume someone who is totally unfamiliar with you or your organization will read your proposal.

14. Make sure your proposal is easy to read. Both type face and sentence structure should be easy to follow. Additionally, the page organization is important to readability. Wide margins all around the page and a balance of text and white space are less overwhelming than page after page of text. A few diagrams, charts or photos can make a more readable proposal if they are pertinent.

15. Finally, don't take anything for granted. No matter how many times the same agency or foundation has funded you, read your proposal over and over again. Mistakes can sneak in the best proposal and such mistakes reflect on you.

Having your grant proposal noticed by grant officers or reviewers can be a difficult task. I hope that these ideas will give your great proposal that little bit extra that it takes to be recognized and funded.

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